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SUBJECT: Corruption continues to resonate as key campaign issue

REF: A) Jakarta 386; B) Jakarta 219; C) 08 Jakarta 2177

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Combating corruption continues to be a popular election campaign message for many Indonesian political parties. Anti-corruption reform and a clean image are critical elements of President Yudhoyono and his Democrat Party's (PD) popularity. The Yudhoyono administration's progress on corruption over the past five years and the numerous corruption cases involving Parliamentarians have led to PD's image as the cleanest party. Smaller parties - particularly the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) - use corruption as a central campaign message, arguing that they will clean up Parliament. A current Parliament corruption scandal involving PD, PKS, and other members does not appear to be negatively affecting PD or PKS's clean image. End summary.

Voters still focusing on clean candidates

12. (SBU) In 2004, President Yudhoyono centered his campaign on an anti-corruption reform platform. And corruption still resonates as a critical issue in 2009 elections. A January 2009 International Republican Institute (IRI) poll noted honesty (60%) and opposition to corruption (24%) as voters' second and third most important criteria to select a legislative candidate. However, only 24% of respondents said corruption was one of the three most important policy issues facing Indonesia, according to the poll. High prices for basic necessities (74% of respondents placed it in the top three issues facing Indonesia), poverty (56%), unemployment (35%), education (31%), and health care (28%) all ranked ahead of corruption. These data suggest that corruption is a useful campaign message, but Indonesian voters do not see corruption as a top policy issue for the government. Economic issues and basic welfare continue to be the bottom line for most voters.

All parties implicated in corruption, but PD cleanest

13. (SBU) No major political party has escaped corruption investigations by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) this year. Transparency International-Indonesia polls consistently rank Parliament as one of the most corrupt government institutions. Recent investigations and prosecutions have confirmed this perception: the Corruption Eradication Commission has prosecuted nine Members of Parliament from a range of political parties since January 2008, has already convicted six, and is investigating others (ref A).

14. (SBU) President Yudhoyono himself has maintained a clean image, which helps to bolster the popularity of PD legislative candidates. A recent Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) poll ranked PD as the cleanest party (25%), with PKS as a distant second (9%) and PDI-P third (7%). Nearly 50% of respondents identified PD as the party that most consistently fights against corruption, according to the IRI poll. President Yudhoyono has also maintained his anti-corruption image by not allowing anyone - including family and PD members - to be above the law. The KPK arrested Aulia Pohan, the

father-in-law of the President's son, in November 2008 (ref B and C). And the President also sent a strong message to a PD Member of Parliament embroiled in a current corruption scandal: stop campaigning and meet with the KPK before the April 9 election.

Smaller parties campaigning on corruption message

15. (SBU) Smaller parties are focusing campaign messages on combating corruption, specifically in Parliament. The PKS campaign motto is "clean, caring, and professional" and its campaign rallies have focused on pledges to establish a clean Parliament. PKS's pledge to remove corruption from Parliament reflects a tack taken by other smaller parties. Gerindra legislative candidate Halida Hatta - sister of current Minister for Women's Empowerment Meutia Hatta - has campaign posters in central Jakarta with a simple message: Gerindra - for a clean Parliament. Bigger parties have focused less on corruption. Golkar was identified as the most corrupt party (18%) in the IRI poll, the only party registering more than 6% of respondents. The recent corruption scandal involving Golkar leader and Gorontalo Governor Fadel Mohammed - a potential Vice Presidential candidate - could feed into perceptions that Golkar is not a "clean" or "anti-corruption reform" party.

PD weathering current scandal, maintaining clean image

16. (SBU) The latest Parliament scandal has implicated PD, PKS, and other Members of Parliament accused of taking bribes related to the recent fiscal stimulus package. Jhonny Allen is a key budget commission member in Parliament for PD, but has a relatively low profile within the party. PKS Member of Parliament Rama Pratama -

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also accused of being involved in this scandal - is part of the younger wing of PKS and holds a higher profile position in his party. Pratama dismissed the corruption charges as a smear campaign in front a large PKS rally. President Yudhoyono and PD leaders have publicly called for Allen to comply with the KPK investigation and accept any penalties if guilty. PD has not suffered any noticeable drop in public opinion due to the scandal, according to political commentators and civil society leaders. PD and PKS are weathering this storm so far. Nonetheless, the scandal reveals the public's interest in corruption cases and the possibility of corruption cases influencing the upcoming elections.

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